

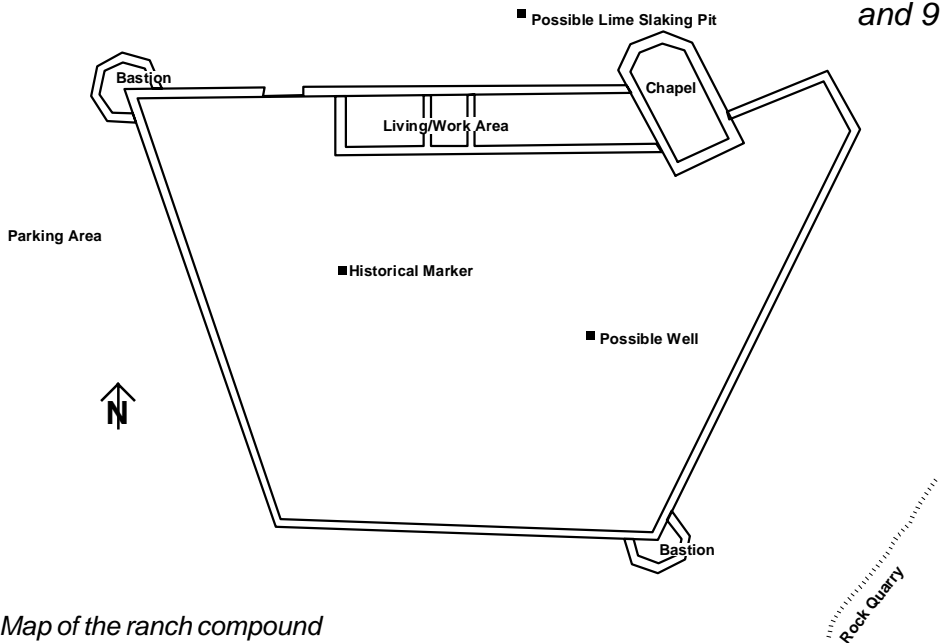
San Antonio Missions

National Historical Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rancho de las Cabras

“There is also a ranch on which stands a stone house with all needed furniture for families who live there and take care of 1,262 head of cattle, 4,000 sheep, 145 saddle horses, and 11 droves of mares and 9 donkeys.”

1762 report of Fr. Mariano Franciso de los Dolores y Viana



Map of the ranch compound

A mission’s goal of becoming self-sufficient depended on the success of its farm and ranch. Ranching proved to be very profitable. Surplus livestock was sold or traded to the presidios and civil settlements as far south as Coahuila and east to Louisiana.

Mission Espada and Its Ranch

In 1731 Mission San Francisco de la Espada was one of three missions re-established on the San Antonio River from what is now East Texas. In addition to the land necessary for the mission's compound, each mission was granted land for farming and ranching. Espada’s grazing lands became known as Rancho de las Cabras, the Goat Ranch.

A ranch headquarters compound was built sometime after 1758. These structures housed the Indian vaqueros and their families who maintained the herds.

Las Cabras, located within 30 miles of Espada, provided livestock for the inhabitants of the mission. The vaqueros oversaw the rapidly increasing herds, allowing the missionary to concentrate on his primary duty: that of educating and converting the native inhabitants.

All of the mission ranches started to decline in the 1770s, when Apaches increased their raids. All unbranded cattle became the property of the crown in 1778, and the vast herds were reduced to several hundred head. With secularization in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the ranchlands passed into the hands of former mission inhabitants and settlers.

Ranch Inventory

In 1772, there were 172 Indians at Espada. They used about six head of cattle per week, or 300 cattle a year for meat. The large mission herd more than met this demand, and the mission often enjoyed a large surplus.

Oxen did heavy plowing. The cattle also produced hides for leather goods; tallow for lighting, soap, and lubrication; and horn

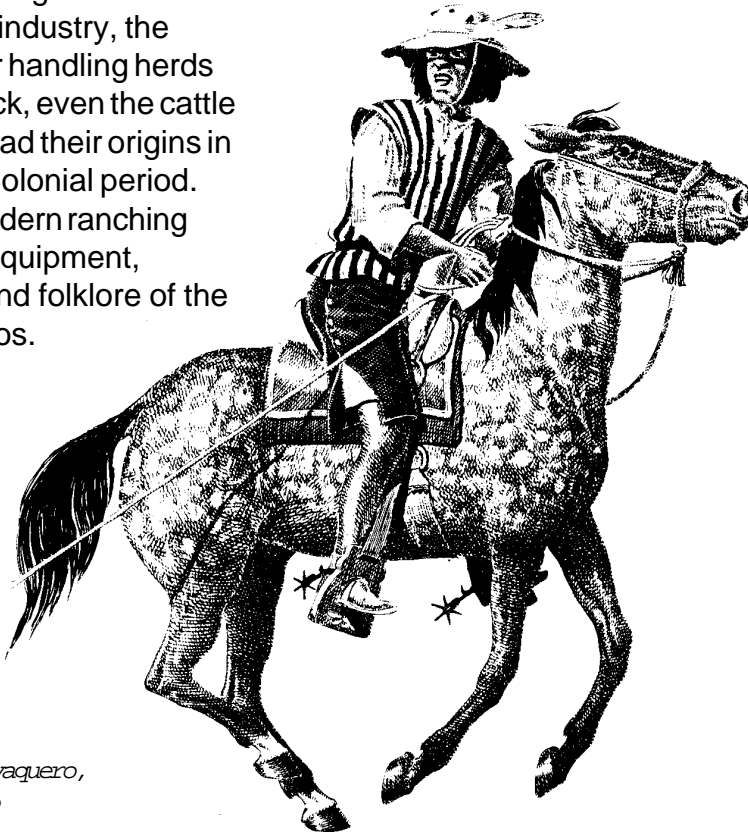
for carving and other uses. Horses provided transportation and the means to herd the other livestock. Cattle, sheep, goats (what few there were), and pigs provided meat. Sheep provided wool, and goats produced milk. Mules and burros were riding and pack animals.



Mission Espada's brand

An Indian Vaquero's Legacy

A century later, much of the Texas cattle industry was built on the legacy of these mission ranches. The regulations which governed the industry, the techniques for handling herds from horseback, even the cattle themselves, had their origins in the Spanish Colonial period. Therefore, modern ranching inherited the equipment, vocabulary, and folklore of the Indian vaqueros.



*Mission Indian vaquero,
by Jose Cisnero*

CHAPS: short for *chaparejos* or *chapparreras*. Leather leggings worn around pants to protect legs.

MUSTANG: from *mesteño*, originally meant wild Spanish cattle.

QUIRT: a variant of *cuarta*, horsewhip.

LARIAT: anglicized version of *la reata*, the woven rawhide rope.

JERKY: portable, dried meat originally called *charqui*.

LASO: variant of the Spanish *lazo*.

RODEO: Spanish, originally meaning a cattle roundup.

BRONCO: wild horse

SERAPE: all-purpose poncho

SOMBRERO: symbol of the vaquero culture; modified by Anglos into ten-gallon hats and stetsons.

CORRAL: Spanish for enclosure.

Rancho de las Cabras Today

On September 15, 1995, the National Park Service acquired a small section of the former ranch lands from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. This tract, located at the junction of Picos Creek and the San Antonio River, contains the ruins of Rancho de las Cabras' compound. It is now administered as part of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

The park staff is currently revising the General Management Plan to include Rancho de las Cabras. This document, when complete, will identify the short-term and long-range strategies to be used in achieving the park's management objectives. If you would like to be part of this planning process, the National Park Service invites you to contact us at (210) 534-8833 for more information, or by writing the Assistant Superintendent, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, 2202 Roosevelt Avenue, San Antonio, TX 78210.

Monthly Tours

Although the site is undeveloped, park rangers will lead tours through the ranch on the first Saturday of each month. Visitors should meet at Floresville River Park in Floresville, Texas, at 10:00 am. to caravan to the site. Tours will last approximately one hour. Because the site contains brushy areas and fire ants, it is recommended that boots and appropriate clothing be worn while visiting the ranch. An unimproved dirt road leads to the area which could cause

difficulties for some low-clearance vehicles. Weather may cause the cancellation of some tours. Please contact the park visitor center at (210) 932-1001 for more information.

